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Thursday, February 14, 2008

Birth control an issue for DPS

Contraceptives could be given out at high school clinics if a ban is lifted.

By Jeremy P. Meyer
The Denver Post

Article Last Updated: 02/14/2008 03:42:34 AM MST

Denver Health has determined it cannot provide birth control to the city's school-based health centers — unless the school board undoes a 22-year-old ban on contraceptives.

If that happens — and the matter is scheduled to be presented to the board next week — contraceptives would have to be made available without parental consent.

"There are two major issues," said John Kechriotis, Denver Public Schools attorney. "One is the decision on whether you distribute contraceptives in a school clinic. That is a big issue that needs to be resolved. Beyond that decision, there is the whole other issue of the parental consent."

Making birth control available from the clinics run out of six Denver high schools emerged
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from a health task force as a way to battle teen pregnancy.

"The feeling was if the school community wants it and parents say yes and we have health professionals who have the expertise, then we should provide it," said Elaine Gantz Berman, chairwoman of the panel.

A spokeswoman for Denver Health, which also runs clinics in six middle schools, said if the school board changes its mandate about contraceptives, the clinics will provide them in high schools.

Colorado Right to Life has been vocal in its opposition to offering birth control.

"This is going to encourage sex, period," said Lolita Hanks, director with Colorado Right to Life. "The best way to get teen pregnancy rates down is to encourage kids not to have sex."

However, Colorado Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy, Parenting and Prevention supports the task force recommendation.

"Research has shown that when access to contraception is paired with effective comprehensive education for youth who are sexually active, it can make a difference in reducing teen pregnancy," said Shannon Sainer, program manager for the nonprofit group. *Jeremy P. Meyer: 303-954-1367 or jpmeyer@denverpost.com*
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Teachers union lets two schools move forward

The Denver Post

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After all the fuss and late-night meetings, we're glad to see the Denver Classroom Teachers Association found a way to approve autonomy requests from two Denver schools.

The move means that Bruce Randolph School and Manual High School can control such seemingly simple matters as how teacher time is allocated and whom to hire.

It's a positive development, but did it really have to be this difficult?

To see an entirely different experience with some of the same issues one need look no further than Aurora Public Schools.

Next week, Aurora's school board will consider whether to allow William Smith High School the same sort of autonomy, plus even more freedom over operation and curriculum.

Predicting the behavior of public officials typically is a dicey proposition, but we're reasonably assured this request will pass without the drama we saw in Denver.

The Aurora Education Association supports the idea and has been involved in the planning from the start. And that may very well be the difference right there.

Last spring, the teachers union and the administration in Aurora began working *together* to explore ideas of how autonomy might improve learning.

Aurora Public Schools superintendent John Barry said one of the first things he did was to send the president of the teachers union and the deputy superintendent to Boston to see a similar plan in action.

Barry told us that Aurora Education Association president Brenna Isaacs and Deputy Superintendent Tony VanGytenbeek came back enthusiastic about what they had seen.

Together the union and administration came up with a framework for a pilot school program. The schools will remain public, but each school will control its school calendar, budget, staff time and even its curriculum.

In exchange for the freedom, schools are obligated to deliver above-average test scores and other improvements.

It likely will take years to see how the Aurora pilot program fares, but it's a bold move by a school district with significant challenges.

We would hope to see that same spirit of cooperation in Denver Public Schools, which has many of the same challenges, including low test scores and high numbers of English-language learners.

We look forward to seeing how leaders at Bruce Randolph and Manual use this flexibility to improve student performance. And we're intrigued by a recent proposal to create an 18-school autonomy zone in northeast Denver.

It's clear, however, that in order for this sort of operation to work, there must be cooperation and trust between the teachers union and the administration. Unfortunately, that seems like it could be a long time coming. However, they took an important first step this week.

Rocky Mountain News

Thursday, February 14, 2008

This just in, February 14

The Hispanic Contractors of Colorado will honor former Denver Mayor Federico Pena with the Political Achievement Award, and Theresa Pena, chairwoman, Denver Public Schools Board of Education, with the Community Advocate Award, at its 18th annual Awards Banquet March 1.

GRIEGO: Rep. Liston to meet with unwed moms he slurred

By [Tina Griego](http://www.rockymountainnews.com/staff/tina-griego/) <<http://www.rockymountainnews.com/staff/tina-griego/>> , Rocky Mountain News ([Contact](http://www.rockymountainnews.com/staff/tina-griego/contact/) <<http://www.rockymountainnews.com/staff/tina-griego/contact/>>)

Thursday, February 14, 2008

It was a flash-in-the pan story, here and gone in a 24-hour news cycle, but this did not deter the girls from writing their letters, some in pen, some typed, each

labored over, readied to be sealed and stamped and sent to the statehouse this week.

"Dear Rep. Larry Liston,

"As a teen mother at Florence Crittenton (School), I think that your comment about us was very wrong . . . You don't have any idea what happens in our lives or what we go through. In your eyes, you may see us as so-called 'sluts.' But in our and our family's eyes, we are young mothers who are still trying our best and going to school to better our lives and our baby's lives . . . "

"Respectfully, Lorelei"

Lorelei is a senior, the mother of a 2 1/2-year-old. She's determined to go to college, she writes Liston. She became pregnant at 14. "Fourteen?" the representative exclaims when I tell him the letters are coming. "I can't imagine. What a way for a 14-year-old to spend her teen years, to try to be a mother and a student, to go through that."

There is the controversy: Liston, a Colorado Springs Republican, denounces unmarried teen parents as "sluts" while harkening back to the days when unwed mothers were shamed, shunned into a home somewhere. He apologized quickly and then formally, on the House floor, and since we are all busy people with much to occupy us, that was that.

Except for the young mothers at Florence Crittenton School. Florence Crittenton is a partnership of Denver Public Schools and the nonprofit Parent Pathways. It's a school for teen mothers, but was once that place where unwed mothers were sent. The school is a refuge now as it was then.

I find its old files in the library. *Sept. 30, 1946. 174 girls and 154 babies received care through the year. The ages of the girls vary from 12 to 34. Three were college grads; 47 had finished high school, four had a seventh-grade education. 94 of our group were Protestant, 30 Catholic, three Mormon, 2 Jewish. More than 57 percent surrendered their babies to (juvenile court for adoption.)*

This, too: *June 1, 1926. An eager group of girls in our Home voiced this question: "Do you think we are bad girls?" Was the answer right? . . . "No, I do not think you are bad girls, only that you have started wrong. You must begin again on the right road. We all must if we want to live right." 15, 16, 18 years old were they.*

And, finally, this, written in the '40s: *"There is far too much prejudice bound up in the thinking toward the unmarried mother."*

Times change, but not that much.

So, there is controversy and then there is its aftermath. "No," Liston tells me when we speak after his apology last Friday, "I'm not advocating we send them away. I know we're not going back to the '40s. But we have to move away from the idea that teens having children carries no repercussions. You may disagree, but I think today's society, as we see it on television, media, magazines, says it's OK to be unwed and have kids, and I don't agree. It's harmful to young people. It relegates them to poverty. Some succeed. Many do not."

I don't disagree. I have a 9-year-old girl, I tell him, and my lessons compete with a larger entertainment culture that would have her believe her value lies in her sexuality, that says, wrongly, the unique spirit that inhabits her is interchangeable, anonymous, a collection of body parts.

Liston is right, too, about poverty. In 2006, only 37.5 percent of the 18- and 19-year-olds who gave birth in Denver County finished high school, the state health department reports. Equally grim, the Annie E. Casey Foundation found the poverty rate for children born to an unmarried teenage mother without a high school education is 78 percent.

This is a real problem. Shame has never been the answer.

In 2005-2006, 100 percent of Florence Crittenton's eligible seniors graduated; two-thirds of those went on to college or vocational school. That's your answer. Parental, academic, social education.

About 170 teen mothers now attend the school, and typically close to 300 moms and their babies are served through the year. The school also offers a young fathers program.

Lorelei, who is 17 now, and Rajeana who is 14 and the mother of an infant, tell me Liston does not understand what they have been through or what they endure now. Give us credit, they say, for trying to be responsible for our choices, for staying in school, for wanting more than a life on welfare. "I think he should come here and talk to us," Rajeana says. "He should," Lorelei says.

"How about it?" I ask Liston later.

"This may be the silver lining in all this," he says. "We might reach a better understanding."

So, "yes?" I ask.

Yes, he says, and give him credit for that. We set a date. The representative and the young mothers have a lot to talk about.

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9 News

Wednesday, February 13, 2008

Superintendent teaches class for first time, highlights shortage

written by: [Nelson Garcia](#)

<<mailto:nelson.garcia@9news.com?subject=RE:Superintendent%20teaches%20class%20for%20first%20time,%20highlights%20shortage>> , Reporter

DENVER – Michael Bennet runs the school district. He was chief of staff for the mayor. He worked for the governor of Ohio and in the U.S. Attorney General's Office. Bennet even handled \$500 million in business accounts for a corporation. But, he's never had to lead a classroom – especially high school students.

"It's nerve-wracking," said Bennet, superintendent of Denver Public Schools. "It's hard to get up in front of a group of teenagers and try to make it interesting for 50 minutes or an hour. Our teachers have to do that everyday."

Bennet recently obtained his substitute teaching license. He and other district administrators decided to do that last year so they could help in the classroom if needed. Tuesday, Bennet taught two periods of an AP World History course at East High School.

"I thought it was really cool," said Emily Gosche, a junior. "I thought he was well-prepared, which was kind of surprising."

Bennet substitute taught for two reasons. One, he wants to broaden his experiences especially since he is in charge of schools. Two, Bennet wants to highlight the district's problem of a shortage of substitutes.

"It's hard to say how short we are, but we know we're short," said Bennet. "There are some steps we are taking to try to deal with this."

The district is considering proposals to increase the pay rate of substitute teachers with a big increase for those who teach at least 60 days within the district.

"We're able to pay them 50 percent more than we were paying them just last year," said Bennet.

Bennet says the shortage is so bad; sometimes schools have trouble filling classrooms for

teachers who are out.

"But, our teachers and our principals find a way to cover classes," said Bennet. "It's not ideal for anybody."

Gosche says usually the subs she sees are pretty good. However, she says she does notice there is a problem.

"We'll have subs who have no idea what's going on and a lot of those times either kids leave or just sit there," she said. "I just do class work from other classes."

Bennet says the district will also start recruiting aggressively to find good, qualified substitute teachers. He wants to appeal to local professionals who have some extra time. The only requirement to getting a substitute teaching license is a bachelor's degree and background check.

"Anybody can be a sub and I think it's a great thing to do," said Bennet.

Gosche says as subs go, Bennet gets a passing grade.

"He brought up good points. He contradicted us. He was afraid to have an opinion so that was really nice," she said. "I know it's probably intimidating to come to class full of kids who've been studying this a lot longer than he has. So, I thought it was very – he did very well."

Bennet says he loved it.

"I've never done it before. I have never taught before. Today was my first day. I'm sure I wasn't terribly good," said Bennet.

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Principals learn with new powers, come new responsibilities

written by: [Jeffrey Wolf](#)

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DENVER - After being initially denied by the teacher's union, two schools started Wednesday as the first public schools with autonomous powers in the history of Colorado.

The freedom granted to Bruce Randolph School and Manual High School may even be unique across the country.

Part of Principal Kristin Waters' job at Bruce Randolph is to watch over the lunch crowd. But with the newly granted autonomy, she suddenly has new duties, like figuring out salaries and budgets.

"Now the real work begins," she said. "What my challenge is now, though, is figuring out how much everything costs."

She has to determine out teacher workloads and class loads because the Denver Public School District can no longer do it for her.

"I don't know where to begin because it's all so new and figuring out how that looks," said Waters.

Waters and the principal at Manual, Rob Stein, now have full control over the budget, who they hire, and what the instructors teach in the classrooms.

"So, this gives me an opportunity in a competitive market for talent to interview people as they come," said Waters.

"There's a lot of discussion that principals need to be CEOs. They need to be in charge of their corporation so to speak. And, they need to have latitude on site to make decisions and have more control over budget," said Stein.

The two principals have these additional powers because on Tuesday, the Denver Classroom Teacher's Association removed its objections to the schools' autonomy and granted them a series of waivers giving them the power they wanted.

"What may be perceived as our reluctance, we really see as more of a thoughtfulness," said DCTA Vice President Melissa Verdeal.

Verdeal says the union initially said no to the idea of giving Bruce Randolph and Manual more powers because it wanted to examine the idea further.

"I think the most critical part is that when discussing a waiver of this magnitude, one of the considerations that we have is what's good for all of our people," said Verdeal.

"Staying how we have been, that's not getting the performance that we need. So something does need to change, so maybe this is the way for everyone," said Waters.

The waivers granted by the DCTA also give Bruce Randolph powers over the school calendar and allocation of a teacher's time.

More schools are now also expected to ask for autonomy from the district.

Waters believes it will be good for her school.

"Now, to not have that barrier and to be able to, 'Hey, here's an idea let's go with it,' and not have to ask 10 people for approval," she said. "It's going to be new for everybody and I think that's going to be the hardest piece."

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7 News

Wednesday, February 13, 2008

2 Denver Schools Granted Freedom From District

District, Teachers Union OK Autonomy Bids From Bruce Randolph, Manual High School

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DENVER, Colo. -- Free at last.

On Tuesday, bids for autonomy from Bruce Randolph and Manual High School were approved by the district and its teachers union.

"I think it's a positive thing for our students and our community," said Bruce Randolph principal Kristin Waters.

Bruce Randolph was once known as the "worst performing middle school in the state of Colorado." Waters said cutting ties with DPS will now allow them the flexibility to make decisions on campus instead of waiting for approval from the district.

"We will have flexibility over our funding and how we spend that money. We will have flexibility on hiring and when we start hiring," said Waters.

Traditionally, district schools have to wait for the official hiring cycle. They would have the post jobs and first open them up to candidates in the district, after that they could look outside.

"Now what I can do is post the position and I can look at candidates both within the district and maybe somebody who is in Connecticut," said Waters.

The goal -- find the best candidates for students.

The break from the district also allows Waters the ability to pay teachers better. She said if they want to teach an extra class -- she can pay them. If they want to tutor students outside of the classroom -- she can pay them.

Parents said it was time for change.

"There are a lot of decisions that have to be made for the benefit of the children and those decisions were being grossly delayed by the district," said parent Holly Hudson.

Bruce Randolph said it's a big step for their campus and they believe many other schools will soon follow suit.

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